# FREDRIKA BREMER

1801 - 1865

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Fredrika Bremer (17 August 1801 – 31 December 1865) was a Swedish writer and feminist reformer. Her Sketches of Everyday Life were wildly popular in Britain and the United States during the 1840s and 1850s and she is regarded as the Swedish Jane Austen, bringing the realist novel to prominence in Swedish literature. In her late 30s, she successfully petitioned King Charles XIV for emancipation from her brother's wardship; in her 50s, her novel Hertha prompted a social movement that granted all unmarried Swedish women legal majority at the age of 25 and established Högre Lärarinneseminariet, Sweden's first female tertiary school. It also inspired Sophie Adlersparre to begin publishing the Home Review, Sweden's first women's magazine. In 1884, she became the namesake of the Fredrika Bremer Association, the first women's rights organization in Sweden.

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Fredrika Bremer was born on 17 August 180 at Tuorla Manor in Piikkiö Parish outside of Åbo, Sweden (now Turku, Finland). She was the second daughter of five and the second child of seven of Carl Fredrik Bremer (1770–1830) and Birgitta Charlotta Hollström (1777–1855). Her grandparents Jacob and Ulrika Fredrika Bremer had built up one of the largest business empires in Swedish Finland but, upon his mother's death in 1798, Carl liquidated their holdings. (A few years later, the Finnish theater of the Napoleonic Wars would see Finland annexed to Russia.) When Fredrika was three years old, the family moved to Stockholm. The next year, they purchased Årsta Castle, about 20 miles (32 km) distant from the capital. Fredrika passed the next two decades of her life summering there and at another nearby estate owned by her father, spending winter in the family's Stockholm apartment. She described her family as "under the oppression of a male iron hand":[8][b] While in Stockholm, the girls were forbidden from playing outside and took their exercise by jumping up and down while holding onto the backs of chairs. She wrote French poetry as early as the age of eight, but considered her time in Paris disappointing because of her father's bad temper. She was considered awkward and rebellious throughout her childhood; and one of her sisters later wrote of how she enjoyed cutting off parts of her dresses and curtains and throwing things into the fire to watch them burn.

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Upon her return to Sweden, she debuted into upper-class society in Stockholm and Årsta but found the enforced passivity of women's life intolerable: "How quietly, like muddy water, time stands for a youth, who, during a boring and idle life, drags out her days." She was deeply touched by Schiller's poems and began to long for some career through which she could do good in the world beyond ladies' traditional employments. As she later wrote, "Embroidering an eternal and gray collar, I grew more and more numb... that is, in my living powers, my wish to live. The feeling of torment did not grow numb. It worsened day by day, like frost during a growing winter. The fire of my soul flickered anxiously with but one wish—to forever die out". The "non-life" she saw awaiting her prompted an outbreak of depression. Her resolve to find work at one of Stockholm's hospitals was undermined by a sister, but she found great satisfaction in charity work around the family's estate in Årsta during the winters of 1826–7 and 1827–8. Her success and desire to keep writing drove her to study literature and philosophy in greater depth. An English friend Frances Lewin introduced her to Bentham's Utilitarianism, which liberalized her political views. Bentham's idea of providing "the greatest happiness to the greatest number" also encouraged her to continue devoting her time to her writing instead of nursing. She wrote during the time "I want to kiss a man, breastfeed a baby, manage a household, to be happy, and think of nothing except for them and the praise of God.

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Bremer settled as the guest of her friend Countess Stina Sommerheilm at Tomb Manor in Norway. She initially planned to work as a nurse at one of the local hospitals but again demurred, instead devoting her time to literature. During this period, the countess's stories of an elderly relative inspired Bremer's 1837 masterpiece The Neighbors. Her close study of the works of Goethe and Geijer—whom she met during a visit to Stockholm in 1837–8—informed several aspects of her next novel, The Home (1839). Her male contemporaries' Gothicism prompted her 1840 play The Thrall, dealing with women's lot during the Viking Age. After the countess's death, Bremer returned to Stockholm in 1840. In 1842, Bremer ended the self-imposed isolation in which she had lived since Böklin's marriage and returned to Swedish social circles, which she portrayed in her Diary the next year. The work also served as her contribution to the discussion engendered by Almqvist's controversial Sara Videbeck. Despite being "dreadfully plain", her many friends knew her as humble but loyal, energetic, and strong-willed. She began traveling first around Sweden and then abroad. Brockhaus inaugurated its 1841 series Select Library of Foreign Classics (German: Ausgewählte Bibliotek der Classiker des Auslandes) with a translation of Neighbors and its success led them to publish seven other volumes of Bremer's works by the end of the next year. By then, Mary Howitt had begun publishing English translations in London and New York. Her 1846 visit to the Rhineland prompted her 1848 volumes A Few Leaves from the Banks of the Rhine, Midsummer Journey, and Sibling Life.

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Inspired by the work of De Tocqueville and Martineau, Bremer visited and traveled extensively through the United States. Leaving Copenhagen on 11 September 1849, she arrived in New York on 4 October. With the intent of studying the effect of democratic institutions upon society, particularly for women, she visited Boston and New England, where she met Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Hawthorne,[20] and Irving; the Shaker and Quaker communities of the Mid-Atlantic States; the South, where she examined the conditions of its black slaves; and the Midwest, where she toured its Scandinavian communities and Indians. Like De Tocqueville before her, she visited America's prisons and spoke with prisoners. She then visited Spanish Cuba before returning to New York, leaving for Europe on 13 September 1851. Throughout her journey, she wrote extensive letters to her sister Agathe which were later edited into her 2-volume 1853 Homes in the New World. Having previously portrayed the Swedish home as a world unto itself, she now portrayed the American world as a great home through the many families who hosted her as she roamed. She spent six weeks in Britain,[8] visiting Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and London and meeting Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, and George Eliot. Her series of articles about England for the Aftonbladet largely concerned her favorable impression of the Great Exhibition, which she visited four times. They were later gathered for English publication as England in 1851. Following her return to Sweden in November, Bremer attempted to engage its middle- and upper-class ladies in social work similar to what she had found in America and England. She co-founded the Stockholm Women's Society for Children's Care.

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In 1856, she published her novel Hertha as A Sketch from Real Life and concluded its fictionalized assault on the 2nd-class status of adult unmarried women under the 1734 Civil Code with an appendix recounting recent Swedish court cases on the topic. The work prompted the Hertha Discussion (Herthadiskussionen) throughout Swedish society, reaching Parliament in 1858. There, the old system was reformed to allow (unmarried) women to petition their nearest courthouse (rather than the royal court) at the age of 25. Five years later, the legislation was revisited and all (unmarried) women were considered to automatically reach legal majority at 25. This did not affect the status of married women, who were still under the guardianship of their husbands, or divorced women or widows, who were already of legal majority. The novel also successfully raised the question of a "women's university". Högre Lärarinneseminariet, a state school for the education of female teachers, was opened in 1861.

Upon her return to Sweden, she expressed her satisfaction with the reforms Hertha had prompted and took an interest in Högre Lärarinneseminariet and its students. She resumed her charitable projects and assisted with the Home Journal, the first women's magazine in Scandinavia, which Sophie Adlersparre had founded during her absence. After a final trip to Germany from July to October in 1862, she remained in Sweden the rest of her life. She was reportedly pleased with the abolition of the Diet in Sweden and of slavery in the United States. She died at Årsta Castle outside of Stockholm on 31 December 1865.

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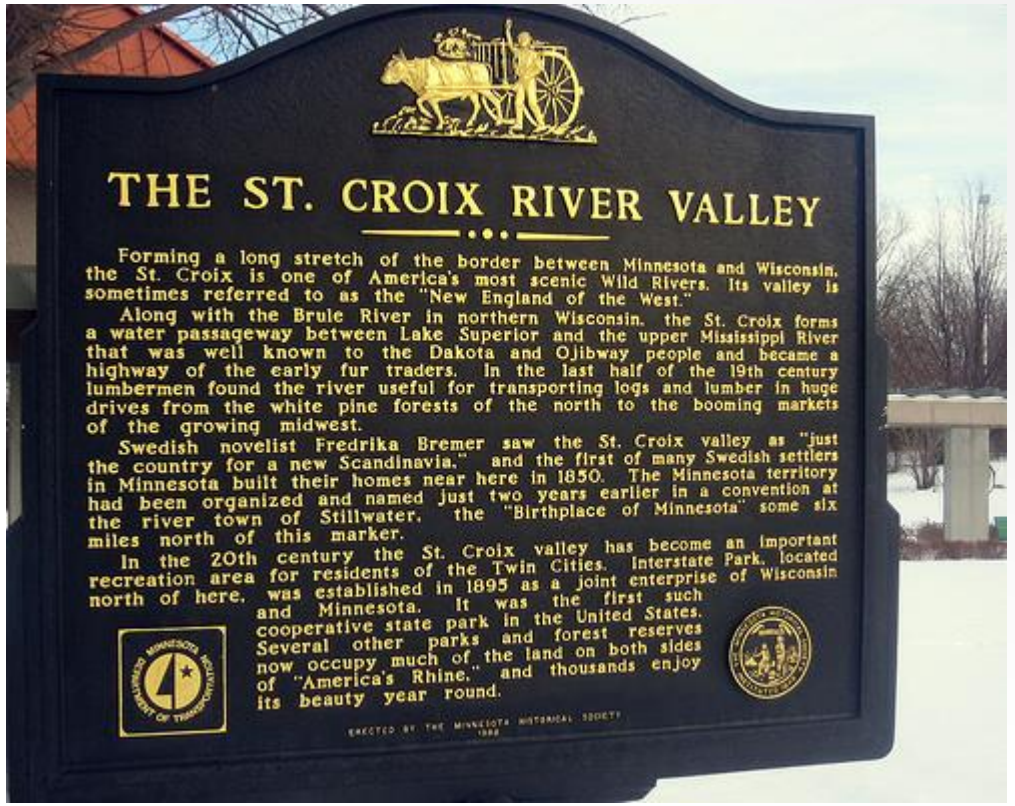
Fredrika Bremer is the namesake of Frederika, a town in the American state of Iowa, and its surrounding Bremer County. She is also the namesake of Fredrika Bremer Intermediate School in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, includes a Fredrika Bremer Room dedicated to her accomplishments.


THE ST. CROIX RIVER VALLEY
Forming a long stretch of the border between Minnesota and Wisconsin, the St. Croix is one of America's most scenic Wild Rivers. Its valley is sometimes referred to as the "New England of the West."
Along with the Brule River in northern Wisconsin, the St. Croix forms a water passageway between Lake Superior and the upper Mississippi River that was well known to the Dakota and Ojibway people and became a highway of the early fur traders. In the last half of the 19th century lumbermen found the river useful for transporting logs and lumber in huge drives from the white pine forests of the north to the booming markets of the growing midwest.
Swedish novelist Fredrika Bremer saw the St. Croix valley as "just the country for a new Scandinavia," and the first of many Swedish settlers in Minnesota built their homes near here in 1850. The Minnesota territory had been organized and named just two years earlier in a convention at the river town of Stillwater, the "Birthplace of Minnesota" some six miles north of this marker.
In the 20th century the St. Croix valley has become an important recreation area for residents of the Twin Cities. Interstate Park, located north of here, was established in 1895 as a joint enterprise of Wisconsin and Minnesota. It was the first such cooperative state park in the United States. Several other parks and forest reserves now occupy much of the land on both sides of "America's Rhine," and thousands enjoy its beauty year round.

Historical marker near Stillwater, Minnesota

Statue depicting Fredrika Bremer in Stockholm

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ÅRSTA CASTLE